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NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS COMMITTEE ON UNICEF

STATEMENT TO THE UNICEF EXECUTIVE BOARD

1. Thank you for the honour of allowing me to address this distinguished body of advocates for children.

2. It has been two years since the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and one and one half years since the historic World Summit for Children. These two events have proven to be major benchmarks in human history, transforming our attitudes and our actions towards children.

3. Many of the activities in which the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Committee on UNICEF has been involved have been directly related to ensuring that the promises of the World Summit are met.

4. In order to broaden the dialogue between international NGOs and indigenous NGOs in Africa - a region facing particularly difficult challenges - the annual NGO Forum was held in Kadoma, Zimbabwe, in November 1991. With the theme of "Effective Participation in Local and Global Child Development", the forum drew over 160 participants from 42 countries representing 113 NGOs. The statement issued at the end of the forum, the Kadoma Declaration (E/ICEF/1992/NGO/6), is a statement of commitment by

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international and local NGOs to give practical expression to the global agenda called for by the United Nations on behalf of children, through grass-roots programmes and regional networking. In the same spirit, the 1993 forum is expected to be held in Eastern Europe, and consideration is being given to holding the subsequent forum in Latin America. The international nature of all of these meetings reflects the changing focus on developing partnerships with indigenous NGOs.

5. On the first anniversary of the World Summit for Children, the heads of many NGO Committee members met in Geneva to evaluate the progress made in reaching the goals of the Declaration and Plan of Action. They requested that an annual meeting be convened to allow them to assess progress towards the Summit goals and to review the roles their organization can play in the realization of these goals. The NGO Committee has followed with interest the development of national programmes of action and expresses the profound hope that all Governments will take this responsibility seriously. It would be only fitting that those Governments that are members of the UNICEF Executive Board, and that endorsed the idea of a World Summit for Children, take the lead in placing children at the top of their political agendas.

6. The NGO Committee on UNICEF has taken a leadership role in promoting the issue of girls' access to education. With UNICEF assistance, its Working Group on Education succeeded in adding this issue to the agenda of the Consultative Forum on Education for All, held in Paris in December 1991. In April 1992, a conference on "Education for All Girls: A Human Right - A Social Gain" was held in New York and was attended by nearly 300 participants from NGOs, Governments and donor agencies (E/ICEF/1992/NGO/2). The conference

reaffirmed that the education of the girl child is a basic human right guaranteed in many United Nations documents and that, despite efforts to eliminate gender disparity in education, it persists and is a major cause of social and economic hardship in many countries. The conference endorsed a "Call for Action" - to Governments and NGOs alike - to erase all discriminatory barriers that hinder opportunities for girls to receive an equal education. The NGO Committee on UNICEF calls upon those Governments present to take the lead in eliminating what the UNICEF Executive Director has termed "the apartheid of gender".

7. The NGO Committee on UNICEF appreciates UNICEF support of NGO participation at the International Conference on Nutrition, to be held in Rome in December 1992. An NGO statement will be submitted to the International Conference Preparatory Committee Meeting in August urging that the Declaration and the Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children be an integral part of the International Conference and that the importance of providing adequate health care for children and women be emphasized. I would like to take this opportunity to ask for your support so that NGOs will be invited to attend the International Conference on Nutrition as full participants in the same way they participated in the World Conference on Education for All. NGO involvement is essential in order that they can support and assist in the country-level implementation of the goals and strategies set forth by the International Conference.

8. Children in especially difficult circumstances continue to receive major attention from NGOs. Through its working group, the NGO Committee on UNICEF is helping to prepare and distribute a fact-sheet - in the six official languages of the United Nations - on the rights of children who are victims of

armed conflict. The NGO Committee urges Governments to seek more peaceful means of solving conflicts and, in the least, to find ways to shield children from devastating circumstances, for in the armed conflicts taking place today, it is the civilian populations that are suffering the most.

9. A major area of concern this year has been the environment. NGOs, working closely with UNICEF throughout the preparatory meetings, succeeded at the fourth session of the Preparatory Committee of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in including substantive references to children. The NGO Committee is very encouraged that these texts, which include the World Summit goals, were adopted at the World Conference in Rio de Janerio. The NGO Committee was also present at the World Conference Global Forum in order to continue to draw the attention of NGOs to the impact of environmental problems on children. The Committee is pleased that UNICEF has been given a mandate to continue to collaborate with other organizations to develop programmes to benefit children and to mobilize children. It wishes to state that it stands ready to support UNICEF in this task.

10. The Committee is especially grateful to UNICEF for the strong emphasis it has placed on NGO participation in planning and programming of UNICEF activities. This partnership should be fostered and should be a force for the greater well-being of the world's children.

11. It is appropriate to end this statement with words from the Kadoma Declaration. While its original reference was designed to inspire solidarity among NGOs, I would like to take the opportunity to extend it to Governments as well. "We are convinced that a spirit of solidarity and common purpose has

emerged throughout the Forum, with a clearer vision of the role we each need to play. Our collective efforts to promote child survival, protection and development must be mutually reinforced with those of all partners and like-minded bodies. We are committed to preserving this solidarity, to continue to work and search together for ways of increasing our effectiveness and to spread this solidarity to others."